

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-8.

BALTIMORE SUN
3 April 1982

Reagan issues strict rules for classifying secret data

By Gilbert A. Lewthwaite
Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—President Reagan yesterday issued a new executive order on the classification of secret information, which he claimed would enhance protection without excessive secrecy and which critics charged could make even road maps secret.

The Reagan system introduces three new categories of secret information, removes previous time limits on secrecy and changes the guidelines for classifying information.

Mr. Reagan, signing the order, said it established "improved standards and procedures to achieve the proper balance" between the right of citizens to be informed and the need to protect sensitive government information.

Morton H. Halperin, director of the Center for National Security Studies, said: "It is a substantial step backwards. It substantially increases what can be kept secret without any justification for it."

The new order replaces former President Jimmy Carter's 1978 rules.

Among the major changes are:

- The introduction of three classification categories covering the vulnerability of systems, installations, projects or plans relating to national security, cryptology, and confidential sources.

Administration officials said the

categories were needed to enable the government to defend itself better against claims in court for classified information under the Freedom of Information Act. The classifications should, according to officials, make it easier to prove information is properly classified.

Critics agreed that the change would assist the government—and make it harder for plaintiffs to obtain information. They claimed the balance was already in the government's favor and said the government had never been forced by any court to release secret information.

They also asserted that under the classification of information on systems, installations; projects or plans relating to national security, even the interstate highway system—a defense-related system—could be classified. Government officials yesterday dismissed such assertions as "nonsense."

- The new order drops the necessity of "identifiable" damage to national security to justify secrecy and substitutes only "damage." Government officials yesterday said this was because they had sometimes been faced in court with demands to prove exactly what the damage of disclosure would be.

Mr. Halperin complained: "It takes away the notion that it had to be a specific, identifiable injury rather than a general concern."

- The new order rules that unauthorized disclosure of foreign government information is "presumed to cause damage to the national security."

The official explanation for this was that foreign confidence in U.S. secrecy needed to be reinforced. Critics said that meant the government would no longer have to prove in court that national security would be damaged by disclosure of foreign information, but plaintiffs seeking the information would have to prove it would not be.

- The Reagan executive order lifts the previous automatic six-year limit on classification and ties dura-

tion of classification to the continued sensitivity of the information. Government officials said that under the previous six-year review system, only about 5 percent of information was declassified.

"It's going to be harder and harder to get any information, no matter how old it is," said one aide on Capitol Hill.

- Mr. Reagan discarded the Carter order requiring that questionable documents not be classified. Instead, the administration ordered that questionable information "shall be safeguarded as if it were classified" pending a determination within 30 days.

He deleted the Carter "balancing test" under which the public interest in disclosure was balanced against the harm of disclosure.